

The East-West Dichotomy: From Orientalism to Postcoloniality

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ABSTRACT: The main purpose of this study is to define and explain the concept of 'Orientalism' developed and practised by Edward Said, a pioneer postcolonial theorist. According to him, the concept of Orientalism refers to the western views about the Orient or the East. However, it has raised a number of debates among the scholars on defining his concept. It can be defined in three ways as: an academic field of study, an epistemological and ontological way of looking at the world and a western hegemony. It has also been the focus of a number of controversies and polemics such as crisis on Orientalism, its connection with western theories and the rise of Occidentalism. Many scholars agree with the fact that the publication of the book *Orientalism* is a beginning of postcolonial discourse in history, philosophy, anthropology, arts and literature. Similarly, it provides an approach to the study of non-western texts. Interestingly because both Orientalism and Non-Western Studies deconstruct the Western Studies, both are therefore sometimes referred to as 'poststructuralist' approaches.

KEYWORDS: Orient, Oriental, Orientalism, Orientalist, postcolonialism

Date of Submission: 15-01-2019

Date of Acceptance: 25-01-2019

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of the Non-West, or the Orient is created by the western scholars and the most important use of Orientalism to the westerners is that they defined themselves by defining the easterners. For example, the westerners defined the easterners or Asians as uncivilized, irrational and ignorant, so the westerners thought that they had every right to civilize and educate the uncivilized easterners. In this way, they started playing the superior role over the easterners and started defining themselves as civilized, rational and learned persons. It is "far more complex (Walker 5) and such consciousness in the westerners gave birth to the idea of the Orient or the Non-West.

Let me discuss briefly about some of the terms used in Said's term 'Orientalism'. The terms as defined by Said are employed in his book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, which was published in 1978.

The Orient: The term "Orient" is derived from the Latin word *oriens* that means "east" or "rising". During the Cold War period, the Orient is also known as the 'Third World' ('Third World' is often taken as synonym for the term 'Orient'). The 'Orient' means the East that includes the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. In a broad sense, the Orient is an idea, a system of representations framed by political forces that brought the Orientals into the western understanding.

The Oriental: The oriental generally means the eastern. The term has been used by the West as a term to describe cultures, peoples, countries, and goods from the Orient. For example, Hinduism can be called as the oriental philosophy; Herbal products can be taken as oriental medicine. In literary usage, the oriental is represented by the western thinking as feminine, weak and exotic. Such western thinking creates a stereotype about the Asians.

Orientalist: Someone from the western countries who studies the languages, cultures, or the histories of the oriental (eastern) countries is the Orientalist. Simply defined, the Orientalists are the western scholars who study about the Orient and its culture.

Orientalism: The term 'Orientalism' refers to the western conceptions about the Orient or the East. In this definition, Said focuses his attention on the interplay between the "Orient" and the "Occident". The Orient is his term for the romantic and misunderstood East (Asia and Africa) and the Occident is his term for the West (Europe and the United States). So the term 'Orientalism' is defined in terms of the interrelationship between the East and the West.

II. THE CONCEPT OF ORIENTALISM

With the publication of his book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Said's concept has been highly influential in postcolonial studies. The main idea of the book is that the western knowledge about the East is not generated from reality, but from stereotyped images that envision all eastern societies as similar to each other and dissimilar to the westerners. For instance, there are two stereotypes that "the East values order, while the West values freedom and that the East values community, whereas the West values the individual" (Walker 5). Such knowledge establishes the East antithetical to the West.

Before discussing the term "Orientalism" in relation to postcolonialism, let us be clear about the concept of Orientalism. In a very general way, the term 'Orientalism' has three definitions:

1. Orientalism as an academic field of study,
2. Orientalism as an ontological and epistemological way of looking at the world, and
3. Orientalism as western hegemony.

Orientalism is an academic field of study about the Orient, which is "constructed in European thinking" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 153). The most readily accepted definition of the concept 'Orientalism' is the academic one. In fact, the term 'Orientalism' is frequently discussed and debated among the intellectuals around the world. It is also taught and included in the courses of universities and colleges around the world. In his book on Orientalism, Said himself defines terms like 'Orientalist' and 'Orientalism' as "Anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient - and this applies whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist - either in its specific or its general aspects, is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism" (2). According to this definition, Orientalism is an academic field of study about the Orient, and the duty of the Orientalists is to engage in academic activities such as teaching/ learning, writing, and researches about the Orient and their culture.

The topic on Orientalism is included and taught as the academic courses of study like history, anthropology, sociology, language, arts, and literature. Very often, the people, society, culture and ideas of the Orient (Asia and Africa) are also taken as the subject of fictional and factual creation for poets, novelists, and philosophers.

Orientalism is an ontological or epistemological way of looking at the world, dividing it into two: the East and the West. Said, defining the term 'Orientalism', writes in his book, "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (2). Thus, a large group of writers, among who are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between the East and the West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, and its culture. In the same book, Said provides similar definition of 'Orientalism' in terms of the distinction between the East and the West. He says that Orientalism is "a willed imaginative and geographic distinction made between East and West" (201). Said here stresses particularly on the boundary line between the Orient and the Occident that grew out of the imagination of the West. What happened was that the westerners started generalizing about the orientals and in doing so infused bias in the western attitude towards the orientals. Even the scientific researches and reports of the western scholars were under the influence of such prejudices.

In fact, when the Europeans started colonizing the Asian and African countries of the East, they made a division of the East and the West or the Orient and the Occident, or the uncivilized or the civilized. This is an imaginary geographical line, which is drawn between the East and the West. Such boundary between the East and the West is created imaginatively by the Europeans for their own use, creating "the form of widespread physical conflicts" (Chew 2). For example, they used Orientalism to define themselves as the superior race as compared to the easterners and justified their colonization by this concept. In doing so, they shaped the orientals the way they perceived them and in this way, they were orientalizing the Orientals.

In defining more historically and materially, Orientalism is "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said 3). Said here is defining the concept "Orientalism" in terms of the features of western imperialism. He says that with the start of European colonization, the westerners came in contact with the lesser developed countries of the East. They found the civilization and culture of the East exotic and started the study of the Orient, which is called as Orientalism.

The westerners defined themselves as the superior race compared to the easterners and tried to justify their colonization by this concept, taking themselves as guardians of the easterners whose duty was to civilize the uncivilized easterners. In this way, they also created a certain image about the easterners in the mind and made their attitude negatively towards the East.

Almost all the colonies collapsed with the end of World War II. Still the westerners have to justify their colonization and retain their control over the eastern countries. They used other ways to control the East, which is known as imperialism (Antonio Gramsci has used the word 'hegemony' for the concept of imperialism). Imperialism is an indirect way to rule over the other countries. In this way, like imperialism and hegemony (forms of ruling), Orientalism is also a new way of ruling over the East in the changing scenario of the world.

III. DEBATES ON ORIENTALISM

In his *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*, Said has created a discourse in the western world. His book has been the focus of a number of controversies and polemics. In the following sections below, I shall discuss these debates on Orientalism in a greater detail:

- Crisis in Orientalism
- Orientalism and Western Theories
- The Rise of Occidentalism (Anti-Orientalist Movement)

In his book, Said talks about the changing circumstances of the world politics and changing approach to Orientalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In such a changing situation, there is crisis in defining the term 'Orientalism', especially for the modern Orientalists. The earlier Orientalism was in the form of written texts that helped the modern Orientalists to form their attitudes about the Orient. But the crisis occurred when the modern Orientalists did not find the Orient as described by such texts. In fact, the texts written by the western scholars and the reality that such texts represent are different. For example, what Napoleon knew about the Orient by his own physical presence came through the written books produced by the Orientalists.

By the time of Bandung Conference in 1955, the entire Orient had gained its political independence from the western empires. The concept of Orientalism has now faced "a challenging and politically armed Orient" (Said 104). Here, the word 'armed' metaphorically refers to the emerging power of the eastern countries. For example, China, Japan and Korea have emerged as economically powerful countries to challenge the western countries. This kind of changing cultural and economic situation in the East has created crisis in the definition of Orientalism.

Globalization is another reason for having crisis in Orientalism because the East and the West came together with free economy and people of the world migrated from one country to another. This movement has created a problem for the concept 'Orientalism'. Scholars and people around the world have come together and the earlier stereotyped images of each other's culture have changed over time, especially with the changing global scenario.

Said, in his book, draws his ideas, what Ahmad termed as "an inventory of traces" (162) from the western literary theories such as Michel Foucault's 'theory of discourse', Sigmund Freud's 'latent and manifest content of dream', Jacques Derrida's 'binary oppositions', and Antonio Gramsci's 'hegemony'. I shall discuss them one by one and relate them to his concept on how far Said is successful in employing the western ideas to develop his theory of Orientalism.

For example, Said has drawn ideas from Foucault's discourse theory for his book. In the simplest sense, discourse is conversation, or communication. For Foucault, it is through discourse (through knowledge) that we are created (qtd. in Said 94). It means that those who have knowledge can control their life experiences and can have enormous power. Thus, discourse joins power and knowledge, and its power creates meaning or truth. So those who have knowledge they hold power and those who are in power decide the meaning or truth about the world that is created through discourse. In this way, discourse is created and perpetuated by those who have the power and means of communication. Those who have not power to control and are in others' control cannot decide about themselves and cannot decide about the conversation. All discourse acts this way. According to Foucault, knowledge, power and truth/meaning are created through discourse (qtd. in Ahmad 164-65). Following the ideas of Foucault, Said has emphasized the relationship between power and knowledge in scholarly and popular thinking, in particular regarding European views of the Islamic Arab world. He argued that the Orient and the Occident worked as oppositional terms, so that the Orient was constructed as a negative inversion of the western culture.

Said also employs Freud's theory of dream in his book. According to Freud, our dream contains two contents: latent content and manifest content. In dream, the repressed desire is the latent content and the dream itself is the manifest content because the repressed desires are manifested through our dream (39-40). Similarly, Said relates Freudian theory of dream in his theory of Orientalism. According to Said, there are latent Orientalism and manifest Orientalism. The latent Orientalism is the internal thinking of the western scholars about the East. Like unconscious element of Freud, there is unconscious biasness about the easterners (orientals) in the western scholars' (Orientalists') mind and such biasness in their minds is expressed through their writings. So the manifest Orientalism is the biasness about the easterners (orientals) expressed in the texts written by the western scholars. In this way, the latent Orientalism exists in the minds of the westerners and the manifest Orientalism is projected in the books written by the western scholars. In common, both latent Orientalism and manifest Orientalism have the stereotyped images about the Orient (the East). But whether it is the latent Orientalism or the manifest Orientalism, the Orientalists are not free from their biasness they have about the Orient and their culture.

Said also employs Derrida's concept of 'binary oppositions' in his book. In this regard, Said says that "the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident" (12), which is a helpful summary of the binary opposition that he creates. However, while he acknowledges this obvious opposition of the Orient and the

Occident, at various stages later in the text, he complicates the issue, referring to the Orient both in opposition to the Western and the European. As this binary construction is so central to Said's thesis, if it is improperly defined, or otherwise indistinct, the whole theory is brought into question.

Antonio Gramsci plays a vital role in shaping Said's theory. In particular, Said can be seen to have been influenced by Gramsci's notion of hegemony in understanding the pervasiveness of Orientalist images and representations in the western scholarship that is related to the exercise of power over the East. For Gramsci, hegemony is a form of control by consent. He distinguishes the society into two: state (or political) society and civil society (qtd. in Said 11). The civil society is made up of schools, families and unions, which are the indirect means of domination. But the political society is made up of state institutions such as the army, the police and the bureaucracy which are the means of direct domination. Hegemony is an indirect way of domination or it is a form of domination by consent. Said draws Gramsci's idea of hegemony in order to define the relation between the East and the West. Like in Gramsci's hegemony, Said argues that the western scholars have maintained their domination over the East, even after the aftermath of the World War II. It is the hegemony of the westerners which is predominant in the texts about the Orient that are produced by them.

To sum up, Said is supposed to oppose the western ideology about viewing towards the East. His main purpose of writing his book is to provide a counter-theory, a "counter-history" (Ahmad 162), to the western theories but his theory of Orientalism is based on the theories of the western intellectuals. That's why many critics have questioned the originality of his theory that he has developed in his book.

Over time, the concept of Orientalism got much criticism in the academia. There is a rise of Occidentalism, which is an anti-orientalist movement in order to counter the westerners' wrong conceptions about the East. The term Occidentalism is an inversion of Orientalism, Said's label for stereotyped western views about the East. In this sense, Occidentalism is taken as stereotyped eastern views about the West.

With the spread of European trade and imperialism during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the modern concept of the East/West distinction came to be more clearly articulated. For instance, the stereotypes of westerners can be found in Chinese, Japanese and Indian art works. In the similar way, the western influence in politics, culture, economics and science came to be constructed through an imaginative geography of the East and the West. This gave rise to an anti-orientalist movement in the East. The eastern scholars and artists, called as Occidentalists, manifested their images of the West through arts and culture. As David Pryce-Jones writes, "A tide of nationalism swept over Asia and Africa" (60). Such anti-orientalist movement is also called as the nationalist resistance to the western ideas. It comes through the forces of modernization that have their roots in the western culture itself.

In this way, the concept of Occidentalism raises debates among the scholars around the world after Said published his book on Orientalism. Both terms 'Orientalism' and 'Occidentalism' are defined, debated and criticized side by side. Both make stereotyped images about each other's opposite world.

IV. POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE AND ORIENTALISM

Many scholars place the beginning of postcolonial discourse in history, philosophy, anthropology, arts and literature at the publication of Said's book. Thus, Said's work is regarded as central to the postcolonial movement, encouraging scholars from the non-western countries to take advantage of the mood of political correctness.

Said took the term 'Orientalism' as "very much alive in contemporary cultural practice" (Sardar 107), which was used in the West neutrally to describe the study and artistic presentation of the East that subverted it referring to the binary opposition of the world into the Orient and the Occident. It also referred to as the East/West binary which is the key aspect in postcolonial theory. In this way, he claimed that there is no existence of the Occident without the Orient. In other words, they are mutually constitutive. Notably, the concept of the East or the Orient, was created by the West, suppressing the ability of the Orient to express themselves. Thus, the critical nature of postcolonial theory entails destabilizing the western way of thinking, therefore, creating space for the marginalized groups, to speak and produce alternatives to dominant discourse.

The most useful way to begin a discussion of the relationship between the theory of Orientalism and postcolonial discourse is to call attention to the controversies and debates that have accompanied their rise as significant intellectual movements from the 1960s. These two movements have in common that both involve in political debate on unequal relations of power and their status as theoretical categories. They can provide us with useful knowledge about the cultures and literatures of previously colonized countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The development of Said's ideas about literature and art (here in terms of Orientalism) paralleled those of the field of postcolonial criticism as a whole. Specifically, both Said's ideas and postcolonial theory are the postmodern intellectual discourse that consists of reaction to, an analysis of, the cultural legacy of colonialism that is "to know, to name, to fix the other in discourse is to maintain a far-reaching political control" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 154). So the common goal of both Said and postcolonial theorists is to dismantle the very

effects of colonialism on culture.

V. NON-WESTERN STUDIES AND ORIENTALISM

Orientalism is one way of viewing the non-western world. In Non-Western Studies, the Orientalists play the role of the critics to analyze the easterners from the perspective of the West. So Orientalism is to provide an approach to the study of non-western texts such as Third World Literature, and other marginalized texts which are excluded from the western intellectual tradition.

On the other hand, Non-Western Studies provides a space for exercising the non-western culture, history and literature. Whereas Orientalism is a theory about the power relationship between the East and West, the Non-Western Studies is a practice of that relationship that “invokes an ongoing dialective between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them” (Tiffin 95). So Orientalism is an approach to the non-western texts; Non-Western Studies is a text designed to explore societies, cultures and common experiences that emerged separately from the western tradition upon which Orientalists critique about.

In both Orientalism and Non-Western Studies, we often discuss the relationship of the two opposites: East and West, Orient and Occident, Uncivilized and Civilized. Said, in this regard, writes, "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, and of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (5). Here, the ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood without their configuration of power. Whether we are dealing with relationship between the Orient and Occident in the discussion of Orientalism or the relationship between the West and the Non-West in the discussion of Non-Western Studies, our common subject for discussion in both would be about the power relationship between the two binary opposites: the center and the margin.

VI. CONCLUSION: DISMANTLING THE EAST-WEST DICHOTOMY

Both Orientalism and Non-Western Studies deconstruct the Western Studies; both are therefore sometimes referred to as 'poststructuralist' approach. Both Edward Said and the non-western writers criticize the incoherence of the position such as the position of the western canon over the world scholarship in which the non-western scholars have no role at all. So the marginalized scholars like Said and non-western writers look for the ways in which one term in the opposition has been privileged over the other in a particular text, argument, historical tradition or social practice. However, this process is never ending because things can have more than one opposite, many different types of privileging can occur simultaneously.

In his book, Said develops the concept of Orientalism that protests against the western hegemony, and that is deconstructed by the concept of Occidentalism. Similarly, the Western Studies is deconstructed by the Non-Western Studies in the sense that the Non-Western Studies has emerged as an emerging force to challenge the Eurocentrism or the western superiority. However, as many critics have accused Said of creating a monolithic 'Occidentalism' to oppose Orientalism of the western discourse, arguing that he was less concerned with establishing a kinship between East and West than with creating a 'difference'.

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Min Pun. "The East-West Dichotomy: From Orientalism to Postcoloniality." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*. vol. 24 no. 1, 2019, pp. 75-79.